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ABSTRACT

An experiment was performed to test the effectiveness of a comparative approach of teaching world cultures to secondary school students. With the comparative approach, cross-cultural comparisons are employed rather than the traditional presentation of one culture at a time. It was hypothesized that students receiving a comparative curriculum would perform better than conventionally taught students on two indices. As expected, comparative students did perform significantly better on a test of course content. However, no effect upon cultural openmindedness of students occurred as a result of a comparative approach. Discussion centered on practical problems of implementing an innovative world cultures curriculum. (Author)

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A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING WORLD CULTURES

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Educators have recently cited the deficiencies of secondary school and primary school curricula in providing students with an appreciation of non-American cultures. Much of the problem lies with the nature of social studies curriculum in general. As Dunfee & Sagl (1966, p. 15) note, "Not only is social studies one of the newest areas of the curriculum; it is also one of the least understood, most misinterpreted areas."

Political events and social movements in recent years have thrust the so-called "Third World" nations into prominence. There is need for innovation in social studies curriculum. But little has been done in evaluating new approaches toward presenting social studies material. For example, a recent review (Skettering & Sundeen, 1969) notes that little research in social studies education has been performed in the last decade.

The present report describes an innovative curriculum approach in the teaching of world cultures on the secondary level. Maximal use was made of community resources and facilities.

The project was initiated in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania school system in the spring of 1969. The Nationalities Service Center (NSC) of Philadelphia, a community organization supported by the United Fund and which promotes cross-cultural programs at all age levels, presented a program proposal to officials of the Philadelphia Board of Education. Under this program a

comparative world cultures course was to be given by NSC in conjunction with two secondary schools, one public and one parochial. The course would be innovative in several respects. First, it was to compare a number of cultures simultaneously rather than the traditional one culture at a time approach. Second, one meeting each week was to take place at NSC and another at one participating school which would host students of the other school. Other class meetings were to be held at the respective home schools.

The school board accepted the proposal and steps were taken to initiate the program. Schedules were made up, guest speakers were approached and scheduled for the weekly meetings at NSC. An important part of the overall planning was the inclusion of an evaluation phase. This document is a report of that evaluation.

It was thought that the comparative approach to teaching world cultures would be superior in two ways. First, students would perform better than conventionally taught students on a test of course content. Second, that students would exhibit more cultural openmindedness, i.e., empathy and understanding of non-American cultures.

METHOD

Subjects. The experimental group consisted of 63 sophomore high school students: 39 girls from John Hallahan High School (Catholic) and 24 girls from William Penn High School (public). Control groups were provided from

sophomore girl students of Kensington High School (public) and John Hallahan High. The subjects were chosen because of the willingness of their schools to participate in the project. Hallahan and Penn were inner-city schools, the student population of Hallahan, predominately white, the students of Penn, predominately black. Kensington High, which provided some control subjects, had a population of mostly black students. Student populations from all three schools were similar in socio-economic status.

Materials. A course content test was constructed by the teacher and NSC staff. Split-half reliability, corrected by the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula was found to be .87 (Sax, 1968, p. 163).

A cultural openmindedness test was constructed with the aid of the teachers involved and NSC staff. Cultural openmindedness was defined as the ability to empathize with and objectively respond to situations occurring in foreign cultures. Subjects were presented with seven situations and were required to respond to four of them. Responses were of the essay-type--in which reactions and opinions of the subject were freely given. Each of the seven test items was a brief description of an event characteristic of a foreign culture, and having little parallel in contemporary American culture. For example, one item described the situation of an aged individual walking off to die. Another item dealt with multiple marriage.

The girls' responses were judged as to their degree of cultural open-mindedness. Eight individuals served as judges, all were professionals employed by the Philadelphia Public School System. Interjudge reliability was found to be .83.

Procedure. The experimental group received the world cultures curriculum as planned by NSC and participating schools. On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays the classes met at their respective schools; on Wednesdays NSC served as the meeting place; the schools alternately hosted each other on Thursdays (the Hallahan girls would go to William Penn or the William Penn girls to Hallahan).

Monday, Tuesday and Friday students received material on world cultures, but taught in a comparative way. For example, a topic such as marriage customs might be taught with the teacher presenting in succession information on the customs of each culture. In the Wednesday sessions a speaker generally addressed the group, followed by a question-answer period. In the Thursday sessions, the Wednesday presentation was usually explored in greater depth.

Speakers addressed the group at NSC dealt with a variety of subjects. For example, one talk dealt with traditional African religions, another with Chinese art. An Ethiopian couple demonstrated the art and music of their country and brought native clothing which was modeled by three girls. A representative of the Indian embassy spoke on education in India.

Subjects in the control group were taught world cultures in a non-comparative way. That is, each culture was taught separately as a unit and comparisons across cultures did not receive as much emphasis as in the experimental curriculum. The class was taught with no interschool visitation or activities at the NSC Center.

Students in both the experimental and control groups were given the content test and the test for cultural openmindedness at the end of the semester.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the content test.

TABLE 1
Mean Scores of Content Test

Experimental		Control	
Public	Parochial	Public	Parochial
66	86	58	67

Analysis of variance was made of subjects' responses on the content test. A summary of this analysis appears in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Analysis of Variance of Content Test Scores

Source	df	Mean Square	F	P
Experimental/Control	1	28.0	8.75	.05
Public/Parochial	1	31.0	9.69	.05
Interaction	1	5.0	1.56	not signif.
Error	56	3.2		
Total	59			

The experimental group was significantly superior ($p<.05$) to the control and the parochial school group was significantly superior to the public ($p<.05$). No interaction was present indicating that the experimental treatment effected both public and parochial subjects.

Data pertaining to cultural openmindedness was gathered. Table 3 shows the results of the openmindedness test, expressed in percentages of responses judged to be openminded.

TABLE 3
Percentage of Responses Judged Openminded

	Experimental		Control	
Test Item	Public	Parochial	Public	Parochial
1	9.0%	6.5%	10.0%	9.0%
2	10.5	10.5	2.6	7.8
3	9.0	14.0	6.0	4.0
4	5.8	17.6	24.7	20.0
5	3.0	18.8	12.5	20.3
6	10.0	18.8	12.5	20.0
7	2.5	5.0	10.0	17.5

Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences between experimental and control subjects regarding cultural openmindedness.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that students in the experimental group would perform better on the test of course content was confirmed. The program had some effect on both the public and parochial students. In addition, the parochial control group significantly exceeded in performance the public control group. No pre-test of any kind was given to any of the subjects (although care was taken to include subjects of similar socio-economic status). It is possible

that the parochial school had provided more extensive preparation in the content area of world cultures in the regular curriculum.

The hypothesis that the experimental group would show more cultural openmindedness than the control group was not confirmed. Some question could be raised as to whether other measures of this construct could have been employed. Future research could well consider the problems of measuring openmindedness. A fixed answer form instrument might be constructed rather than using judges and free answer form.

Some implications for the teaching of social science can be made from this experiment. Certainly more study should be given to the use of the comparative approach--with other samples and a variety of instruments to measure course content.

The feasibility of the comparative approach in teaching world cultures has been questioned by some authors. For example, Wilson (1969) had two objections to the comparative approach. First, that some teachers might have insufficient academic preparation to use it, secondly that the historical aspect of each culture might be "squeezed out" of the curriculum (apparently because of undue emphasis on contemporary cross-cultural comparisons). Both objections could have some validity, but they do not represent insurmountable problems if local school personnel plan intelligently. In the present study, the comparative world cultures curriculum was devised by the parochial and public school teachers from the existing curriculum materials. The existing material was simply restructured. The problem of academic

preparation was thusly eliminated. The teachers were using familiar material, but in a different order and with a different emphasis.

Since curriculum construction is the responsibility of local personnel, the problem of any component being eliminated must be faced when the curriculum is being planned. There is no particular reason why history or any other aspect of cultures would be eliminated. If existing curriculum materials are adapted for use in a comparative way (as in the present experiment) little difference in course content should result from adaptations.

The use of community resources is a significant aspect of this program. In non-urban settings such resources are obviously unavailable or at least limited. The ingenuity of the local staff is an important factor. Films and periodic lectures, especially when presented outside the schoolroom environment, can do much to enrich the curriculum in world cultures.

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